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Senegal: Prospects for Stability

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Summary

Pro-Western Abdou Diouf, elected President of Senegal in February 1983 after a two-year interim presidency, faces popular pressure for improved living conditions and a clean break with the inefficiency, corruption, and cronyism that characterized his predecessor's government. In addition, Senegal, which is strategically and politically important for France and the United States, is one of many moderate states in West Africa in financial crisis. The US Embassy points out that Diouf faces severe constraints in allocating increasingly scarce resources among competing political groups that he cannot afford to alienate.

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Diouf realizes that his regime must revitalize the economy before irreversible decline and political destabilization set in. The country faces serious economic problems that were brought about by dependence on one crop (peanuts) and excessive state involvement in economic life, which led to a

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proliferation of inefficient state-run enterprises. Recurrent drought and the global recession of the 1970s resulted in a convergence of several bad crop years and depressed world demand and prices for Senegal's peanut exports. [redacted]

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Senegal's traditionally pro-Western orientation, close ties to France and effective military apparatus reduce the risk of serious outbreaks of unrest. Despite an official policy of nonalignment, Dakar has carefully limited ties to communist and radical Arab states, while France has become an increasingly important source of aid and guarantor of the country's security. The apolitical Senegalese armed forces consider itself to be the guardian of political order and its self-restraint and competence make it a key asset to the regime. Nevertheless, we believe that any signs of serious unrest would make Senegal an inviting target for outside meddling. Tripoli, Moscow, and Tehran almost certainly will persist in trying to increase their influence with domestic religious and political dissidents. [redacted]

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Political and Economic Worries

Thus far, Diouf has proved adept at balancing the competing interests of Senegal's six major tribes, labor, students, and military factions, and has gained initial acceptance by powerful Muslim religious brotherhoods to which 80 percent of the population belong. Most recently, he put his own stamp on the government by replacing powerful, old-line politicians with younger technocrats who owe their political loyalty and positions to him. [redacted]

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Despite Diouf's promising beginning, we believe there are warning signs that Senegal's political climate could become increasingly tense. Although the 14 opposition parties --most of which are left-leaning-- are badly divided among themselves and have yet to show much popular appeal, several of these parties have received some Soviet and Libyan financial backing, and, if Diouf begins to falter they could serve as focal points for more serious opposition. More troubling, however, is the prospect that Senegal's continuing economic malaise will begin to undermine Diouf's popularity and legitimacy. Dakar had little economic choice last summer but to implement the IMF's stringent austerity program --which included sharp price increases for key food commodities and petroleum products, reduced subsidies to farmers, and deep cuts in government spending-- in

exchange for a one-year standby agreement. []

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In our view, prolonged austerity could spur unrest among segments of Senegal's more politically aware urban population. Students, labor, and Muslim leaders are dissatisfied with the country's economic decline and Diouf will find it increasingly difficult to blame his predecessor for painful austerity. Although divisive political wrangling in the face of economic hardship could provoke grumbling in the officer corps, Senegal's well disciplined military probably would continue to remain aloof from politics. []

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Foreign Policy

We believe Senegalese foreign policy will continue to be driven by the twin needs of finding massive aid to keep the country economically afloat and securing political-military support to counter Soviet and Libyan intervention in regional affairs. Diouf is under no illusions concerning Soviet and Libyan intentions in Africa or the region's vulnerability, and believes that only a strong Western military and economic commitment can provide adequate protection. []

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Diouf has continued to limit official ties with the Soviets to cultural and educational activities and has turned down Cuban requests to establish an embassy. Dakar receives no military or economic assistance from Moscow and there are no Communist military or technical advisers in the country. We believe the size of the Soviet Embassy in Dakar --the 110-man mission serves as Moscow's regional West African headquarters-- keeps the Senegalese Government particularly alert to Soviet activities. []

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In 1980 Senegal, angered by Libyan efforts to stir unrest among dissident groups, broke diplomatic ties and has since turned aside Tripoli's numerous approaches to restore relations. Dakar remains concerned that a Libyan diplomatic presence would encourage Tripoli to renew subversion and try to win support for Libyan leader Qadhafi's radical policies among Senegal's large Muslim population. []

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Senegal has similar concerns about Iranian intentions, especially with regard to Senegal's large Lebanese Shiite community. []

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In keeping with its nonaligned posture and close ties to moderate Arab states, Senegal grants diplomatic status to the small PLO office in Dakar. Diouf continues to encourage PLO chairman Arafat --who visited

Dakar last month-- to pursue peace negotiations with Israel and Arab moderates. []

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French Military Presence

Military cooperation between Senegal and France has remained extensive and virtually unchanged since independence in 1960. Under a mutual defense agreement Paris is obligated to intervene at Dakar's request if the country's security is threatened. Some 1,350 French troops are stationed in Senegal, of which 50 are on the general staff, 450 assigned to the navy, 400 to the air force, and 400 to the army infantry. Dakar is the main naval logistics and communications base for the French central and western regions. Yoff airport was used for refueling by the British during the Falklands crisis and French Atlantic maritime air patrols stage from Dakar. Large-scale French military exercises held in Senegal in December 1982 helped demonstrate the security role that France is willing and able to fulfill. []

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Effectiveness of Security Services

Senegal's armed forces are one of the best trained and disciplined and most apolitical in sub-Saharan Africa. The armed forces number about 14,600 men, of which 10,200 are in the army, 650 in the navy, 550 in the air force, and 3,200 in the gendarmerie (police services). []

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The police service includes a paramilitary counter terrorist force of 120 men. The force members are recruited from the elite of the gendarmerie, and French instructors train them intensively to respond to the entire range of terrorist acts. The force is armed with classic anti-terrorist equipment as well as HK-33 assault rifles and Smith and Wesson revolvers not used in the regular armed forces. The force distinguished itself in December 1981 during the attempted coup in the Gambia when it stormed a military camp to free the Gambian president's wife and other hostages. In December 1982 it participated in effectively controlling a separatist demonstration in Senegal's Casamance region. []

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Potential for Terrorism

Despite Senegal's record of political calm, we believe the potential for terrorist incidents still exists. The presence of a PLO office and the ever-present possibility in West Africa of Libyan-backed subversion could prove disruptive. Although the small but active Iranian Embassy was ordered closed, --Dakar still maintains diplomatic relations with Tehran, - the Iranians are unlikely to be deterred from trying to stir trouble. Moreover, Dakar is concerned that the possibility of an Algerian-supported Polisario state near its border could pose a threat to the country's security. []

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Nevertheless, we believe the Diouf regime responds to potential security threats with prompt and effective countermeasures. Dakar's expulsion of Tehran's diplomats following their suspicious activities and its refusal to permit a formal Libyan or Cuban presence demonstrates Senegal's caution. Deteriorating economic conditions may spur outbreaks of public frustration in the near term, but Senegal's military and security services are relatively well-equipped by African standards to restore order. Moreover, the Diouf regime can rely on French forces in Senegal to assist the government in the event of serious unrest.

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